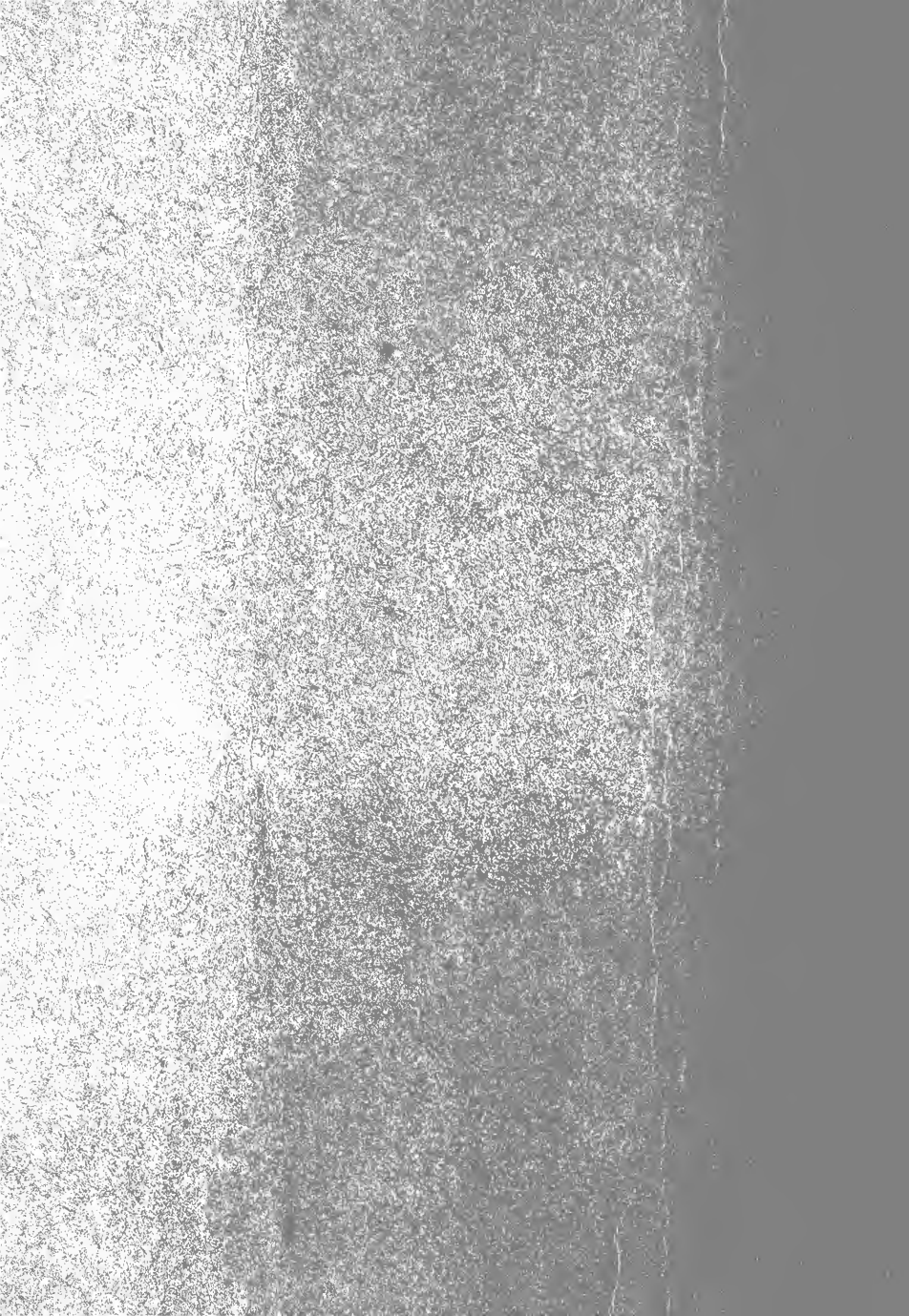
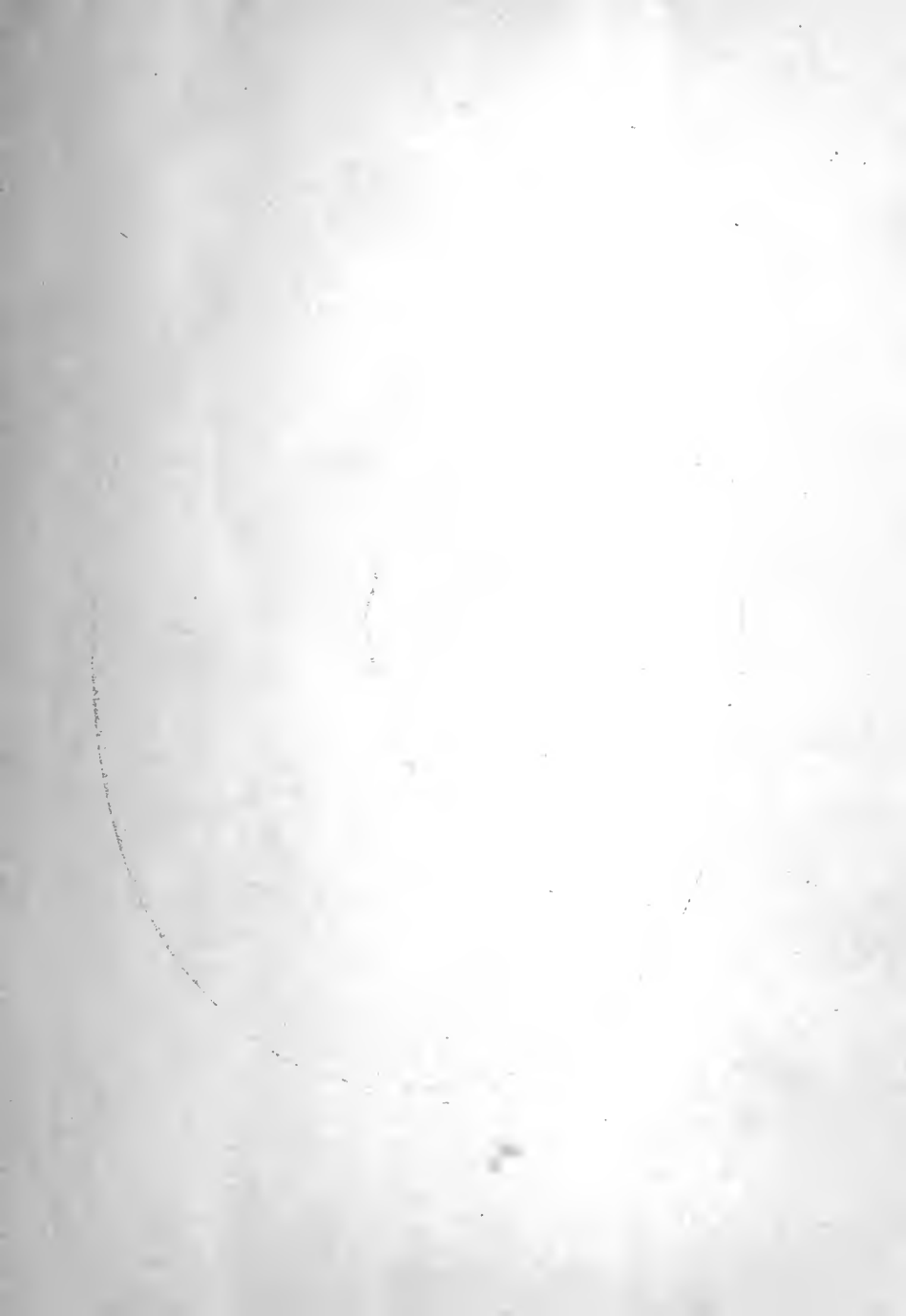


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THE
OLD PIANO
GOULD







THE
OLD PIANO

BY

PHIL. W. GOULD.

A MONOLOGUE

TELLING A NEW ENGLAND HOME STORY OF

HALF A CENTURY AGO.

IDA GROVE, IOWA.

1903.

Oct 29-1903
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The Old Piano.



PREFACE.

As several thousand original works are now published each year, it is plain that to preface each one with a few words of introductory extenuation, is a custom of no decadent merit.

*A public gathering will always enjoy a novelty in the form of entertainment, but to remain in favor the novelty must be continually renewed. As Mr. Gould's story, telling of New England village life before the war seems to grow most in favor in those localities where it has been repeatedly given, it would indicate that he has achieved something more than a novelty, and that *The Old Piano* owes its popularity to the rarer merit of being interestingly and pleasingly commonplace.*

Mr. Gould's monologue, given for several years past under the management of the Chicago and Lyceum lecture bureaus, has brought frequent requests for some permanent souvenir of the entertainment, and this certainly in some degree justifies this edition.

—Harley Barnes.



The Old Piano.

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1903

By PHIL. W. GOULD



The Old Piano.

It is an old fashioned story of an old fashioned village,
An old fashioned Yankee Squire, his grand daughter;
An old fashioned piano, illustrated by old fashioned songs .
Sung in an old fashioned manner, rendered perhaps by an old
fashioned fellow.

'WAY down east on the shores of a beautiful lake
At the foot of the hill nestling a village;
Where in the drowsy summer time
Flow rippling rills adown a valley.
Where stretches meadows of living green,
Dotted here and there by fields of ripening grain
Whose golden sheen rises and falls,
Darkens and lightens, in the gentle summer wind.

It was a peaceful valley, bordered by hills,
Ancient trees, and moss covered rock.
Twenty miles from the railroad
Its calm had never felt the shock of the whistle
Of the iron horse, or the rush of new notions
And new fangled ways.

The Old Piano.

Squire Hancock, he was the great man of our town,
Whose stone mansion adorned the hill side so somber and
A great man the Squire, yes, great indeed. [brown.
A typical Yankee, tight as the bark on a beech tree,
Yet honest the Squire, yes, strictly honest was he,
But he help in charity? Well, if he did help, great was the need.

Still the Squire had a soft spot in his heart,
Though to the outside world it seemed encased in triple steel.
One there was in his household, who to him ne'er made a vain
'Twas Sallie his little grand daughter, [appeal.
A merry laughing little sprite,
Whose hanging curls were as black and glossy as the raven's
And whose eyes were as dark as midnight. [wing,

She was the daughter of his only child, his only son
Who leaving the old home long years ago, never back would
At last came Sallie from a foreign land, [come.
Bringing to Grandpa a letter, written with his son's dying hand.
To the Squire it said, 'Father I send you my motherless little
Sallie is her name, in her may your old age be blessed. [girl.
Forgive me for wandering so far, for e'er you read this letter
'Neath the waving grass I'll lie at rest.'

There is a story current in our town
Told by those who stood by when this letter was read,
That for the first time in any one's remembrance
The old Squire tears did shed.

The Old Piano.

It must have been those tears falling down on that stony heart.
Wore in its adamantine hardness
A little soft spot for the daughter of the dead.

Sallie's mother reared in soft and sunny clime
Had been a wonderful singer in her day and time.
But to Sallie full of childish sport and play
No dream of harmony as yet had ever come,
Till wandering through our quiet valley
And if possible still more quiet village,
Came a strolling gypsy singer, a character now obsolete.
A careless happy vagabond, with a voice that was good and
And he sang to the playing of his twanging guitar [sweet,
This song of home.

"In the deep twilight, I wander alone,
Through the old house as of yore.
But the dear home friends that my childhood hath known,
Are gone to return never more."

It chanced as he sang, he had paused to rest
Before the gate of the Squire's home,
And the Squire's household gathering around
Listened while the stranger sang his best.
Sallie stood as one entranced, listening with eager intensity,
[parted lips,
Eyes shining with wakening fire, the whole enraptured
[countenance showing a new desire.
Her artist soul was wakened and pluming itself for flight,
'Soared forth on wings of harmony' claiming its own by right.

The Old Piano.

The singer made his bow, took his pence and went his way
But in Sallie's heart new chords vibrated,
To her the wonderful power of music had come to stay.

WINDING down the valley, disappearing around the
Ran the old stage road. [hill side
We didn't know much of the outside world
But our town was connected with the marts of men
By the old fashioned stage.
Which coming up the valley at eve, creaking 'neath its load
Mid clouds of dust, with galloping leaders
Would swing around the corner to the post office.
The whole village was there, to exchange gossip and to receive
[any mail that might come to them.
For we had friends who had gone out into the world,
To fight its battles.
Friends for whom we often prayed, and as they left us bade
them God speed.
Watching them go with longing look, commending to them e'er
That dear and precious book, the Bible. [they departed.

"No book is like the Bible for childhood, youth and age,
Our duty plain and simple we find on every page."

The Squire got a letter one day, it said 'We ship as you ordered
One pianoforte. Tomorrow it will arrive.'

The Old Piano.

When Sallie knew that she was to have a piano
She shouted aloud and ran and threw her arms about the old
And kissed him right before the crowd, [Squire's neck
Not caring for us, for we were her friends.
Then Sallie wasn't like some girls, she wasn't at all proud.

When the piano arrived the next day
The whole village population made it in their way to be there,
For to us it was a great event.
In all the country around there was no other instrument,
Save Miss Sharp's melodie and Jake Teedles' old fiddle
Which he had played at all the dances and husking bees the
[years gone by.
Now Jake's stock of tunes was rather limited, but you'd ought
[to see the crowd wake up when he'd strike up and play.
Twan't none of your classic music with rolling Wagnerian sound
But the good old fashioned melodies
The Irish Washer Woman and Over the Hills and Away.

The piano was unloaded and taken from its box.
Willing hands carried it into the house,
When we all fell back and kept as still as could be
While the man who came with the instrument
Sat down and tried every key.
Then he played and the room rang with strange sweet melody
And Sallie cried for joy, she was so glad,
And touched the keys with fingers that trembled

The Old Piano.

As though she knew it would feel her touch and respond.
Then turning to us in her pleasant, happy way, she said
'I invite you all to come again, when I get so that I can play.'

Then Miss Sharp the village milliner, who owns the melodie
And who plays by note they say,
She sat down and sang and played the old fashioned airs
In a most wonderful way,
That beat the chap from the city, till he had nothing more to say.
Among other songs that she sang that day
Was one that touched some of us, who knew how things used
[to be in the old home,
Till we almost broke down and cried. 'Twas about the old
[wooden rocking chair.
There it had stood in its corner, ever since the Squire's wife
[had died.

"There it stands in the corner with its back to the wall,
The old wooden rocker so stately and tall."

Our town grew lonesome, for Sallie went away to the city to
And the old Squire shut up the house [boarding school.
And wandered away out West, to Iowa,
Where he had friends who had gone to that wilderness
To build for themselves a home nest.
Five years passed away, when one June evening the Squire and
[Sallie came back to stay.
The Squire wasn't much changed,
Only he'd learned to tell some whopping stories, while he was
[gone.

The Old Piano.

Stories that could well a fairies' book adorn.
Why, he said out West, things was way 'head of us here.
That they'd raise in one field a hundred acres of corn,
And that wasn't all, that it grew so very high
That a man could pick the ears from on horse back
As he went riding by.
It seemed sad to hear an old man talk that way
But we knew the Squire,
So we just kept still, said nothing and let him have his say.
Sam Perkins' uncle, a sort of roving chap
Went West and after he had been there some years,
Used to write back just so.
But we knew what he was after, he wanted to get us out there
So he'd have neighbors that he knew.

But Sallie, my! didn't she shine?
She'd grown so tall and handsome
And dressed so mighty fine.
It seemed as though her hair was blacker than it used to be
And her eyes so sparkling bright.
She had grown to be such a fine lady
That we felt kinder like keeping back out of sight.
But she stepped right to the front and welcomed us most heartily
As had always been her wont.
And invited us up to the Squire's the very next day.
For she said 'I want you all to come and give me a good old
[fashioned welcome home.'
You are right we went, the whole village was there,
We made it a holiday.

The Old Piano.

So many of us we had to stand out by the windows in the open
While Sallie played the piano and just made it talk. [air,

My, couldn't she sing?

It seemed so good to get the Squire and Sallie back,

It seemed as though we had been asleep,

And things had been getting rather slack.

Did you ever hear our choir sing?

If not you've missed a treat.

I have heard some good singing in my day and time

Full of enthusiasm and fire,

But I never heard any that could beat our choir.

Sam Perkins was the leader, tall and very slim

And when he sang high tenor, his voice was like air

Whispering through the trees, on a summer evening when all

You have heard it I know, how musical it sounds [is still.

With its creak of bough, rattle of dry leaf, rustle of green.

I don't know that I can describe it to you

But you know what I mean.

There is something wonderful in the music of nature,

Because it's God's music I ween.

Miss Sharp sang air or treble

And as her voice would lead so magnificent and grand

You would shut your eyes and listen,

Like it was an angel band.

And on the solos there wasn't nothing sharp about Miss

But it sounded like a brown thrush's trill. [Sharp's voice,

The Old Piano.

'Way off up in a swaying elm
Or as a silver bell soft and low,
As she sang those sacred songs that thrilled one through and
Becky Stone sang alto or counter, [through
And in the harmony her voice made a silver thread
She sang so very sweetly, and I have often heard it said
No one could sing counter like Becky.
'Twas like the beautiful shading one sees on the leaves
After the first frost of autumn time.
It filled the melody and completed the poet's rhyme.
Hans Kruger the only German in our town
He sang the bass.
And his singing had renown,
Far and wide Hans was the village pride.
No one but he could sing so full and deep
And one of his favorite songs was this,

ROCKED IN THE CRADLE OF THE DEEP.

"Rocked in the cradle of the deep
I lay me down in peace to sleep."

But I was speaking of the singing of our choir
On Sunday morning when Parson would give out the hymn
Sam Perkins would strike his fork
And sound the tone so sweet and thin,
Do, Sol, Mi, Do, Do, Mi,
One, two, three, sing.
Then the music would burst from their throats
And fill the church and seem to inspire everything,

The Old Piano.

Till the very pews would seem to vibrate with the strain,
And one could almost catch the rustle
Of the listening angels' wings.

'Twasn't long till we had another surprise
A right smart, spruce looking city chap
Came courting Sallie, right before our eyes.
And as she didn't seem to object, we had to let him be.
But we watched him mighty close, didn't have much to say
Just to see what he would do. [when he was around
But he proved himself a man through and through,
And when the wedding was announced,
Bless you 'twant no news.
But we decorated the old stone church, filled the pews,
Listened to every word the parson said
That made them one.
Wished them joy with tearful eyes,
For Sallie was raised among us and seemed to belong to us all.
But we watched them go away in their carriage to the train
And scattering to our homes, wished them back again.
And with the poet we could sing

"The bells had pealed the wedding
The organ notes are done,
The solemn vows been taken
That made our loved friends one."

Did you ever go to singing school?
I mean the old fashioned kind.

The Old Piano.

How memory flies to the old school house beneath the hill
Where in the long winter evenings we met for practice and [drill.
The master'd write notes and exercises on the board for us to
Which we'd often try and would as often fail. [sing
The master, I can see him yet, with his curious talk and
With his down, left, up, and one, two, sing. [funny ways,
While we standing in line with nasal tones
Long drawn and loud,
Each one trying to sing the loudest of the crowd.
The master'd try so hard to keep us in time.
He'd swing his arms and stamp his feet
And get as red as a beet,
While each of us trying his praise to win
By seeing who could make the most din.
At recess we had a jolly time
Cracking nuts and telling tales
And at the close, standing at the door till she came in view.
The timid question asked of 'Can I see you home?'
The awful fear of the mitten right before the boys
The sigh of relief when the deed was done
The long, blissful walk down the moonlit country road
The pause at the gate, the good night said
And happy fate was ours if the moon away was hid
Because then a kiss was ours unchid
For such was the rule in the good old day,
If when you reached the gate the moon was hid away.
Of course if was hid away.
Did you ever see an old fashioned New England hood?

The Old Piano.

The sweet face buried in its depths
And when the eager, boyish face closed the front of the hood
In nervous haste for the kiss his due
There's no moonshine there, I can tell you.
Yes, those were happy days gone never to return
Like the comrades of our youth time.
God grant that we may meet in that blest clime
Where parting is no more.

"Where is now the merry party I remember long ago?"

The women had a sewin' bee, down at Grandpa Hardman's.
The men folks were invited to tea
And to stay in the evening and watch the young folks play
And talk over the weather and the crops. [games
I don't suppose you have with you here
What we had in those days so queer
A village gossip.
But we had them and you'd ought to hear them talk.
There was old Miss Pankey, said she to the crowd,
'I just allow'd I'd tell you Parson is getting rather free.
Although he is an old man, over eighty-three.
I saw him with my own eyes, with my own eyes I say
Walkin' down the main street of the village right in broad day,
With that flirtin' young thing, Mary Ann Lee.
Supposin' now it had been in the night, when no one could see,
What an awful, awful thing it would be.
What shall be done about it?
What punishment is good enough for a man so scandalous as he?"

The Old Piano.

So they rattled on about the young schoolmaster and Miss Sharp
And raked the whole community right and left, until you'd
[think outside of them,
No one had any chance of being saved in the whole race of men.
Sam Perkins heard this talk about the parson and others
And he says, says he: "I know such things will occur,
So I'll sing you a song about a miserable cur,
Which animal", says Sam, "don't keer how anybody feels,
But is one of the kind that bites at your heels."

"I like honest pluck in this warfare of life,
I like a man boldly to say what he thinks,
And not fill me with hollow deceit."

Hans Kruger heard this song and said:

"Dot vas a pretty goot song, don'td it?
But I von couldt dell, of a neighbor of mine
Who once by me in der city did dwell.
Who had von dog, dot vill beat dot von of your song.
I touldt you dot stories, it vont take very long.
Dot dog he vas dose kind of dog, what ketch dose rats so sly
Und squeeze him mit his little teeth, und den dot rats he die,
All down upon dot market place, vere vish und clams dey sell,
Dot dog must poke his nose round about,
Shust to find out vot he schmell.
Dot lobster he vas fast asleep, mit von eye open vide,
Und ven dot dog vas come aroundt, dot lobster he vas spied.
He poke him mit his nose, und scratch him mit his claws,
Und turn him round about a couple of times,
Shust to find out vot he vas.
Pretty soon dot lobsters he voke up,
Und crawled shust like dot snail.
Und make vide open of his claws, und grab dot doggie's tail.
Und den so quick as never vas, dot cry went to de skies
Und like dose swallows vot we sing, dot dog vas heimward flies.
I make me dot run to catch dot dog, und vhistle awful kind
It makes no difference vot I say, dot dog don't look behind.

The Old Piano.

Dot race vas pretty lively, dot sight vas awful grand
Every corner dot goes round, down vent dose apple stands.
Der vimins schream, der shildrens cry, der mans fall on der ground,
Und dot boliceman mit his club, vas no veres to be found.
Pretty soon dot race he vas end, dot dog vas lost his tail,
I take dot lobster home und cook him on dot pail.
Und dot moral vas, which don't before vas known,
Don't dry to find out too much dings, which vasn't of your own."

At last Sallie and her husband came back to the old town to
He, Sallie's husband, bought the old stone mill [live
And turned it into a factory, and our town livened up and put
[on more airs than ever before was known.

The years rolled by, three times three,

When one night coming up the old stage road

A wonderful sight we did see.

'Twas the old stage coach, being driven at a terrible pace,

As though someone they were trying to run a race.

We rushed to the postoffice to see what it could mean,

When the coachman, John, rose in his seat,

Raised his whip for silence and said:

"Fellow citizens, I am no speech maker, nor nothin' like that,

But our country is in danger,

Fort Sumpter has been fired on, I am going to the front,

And he is a miserable coward who won't."

Then he got down and we scattered to our homes as though we

For the news was so sudden we were all amazed. [were dazed,

But after the first shock, came the rally.

A meeting was held in the old stone church,

Strong words were spoken, words good and true,

And Sallie came to the front of the alter's rail,

And sang "The Red, White and Blue."

The Old Piano.

And we cheered and shouted, and when the call came for vol-
[unteers,

Each looked at his neighbor to see what he would do.

And mid silence that was still, impressive and deep,

Sallie's husband arose from his seat, walked down the aisle and
[wrote his name in the officer's book.

Squire Hancock made a speech, 'twas full of patriotism and fire,

He told how his ancestors came of old colonial stock,

And when the Declaration of Independence was signed,

His relative wrote his name so bold, "John Hancock,"

So that the king without glasses might read it, you know,

And we cheered and shouted, "Bully for you," even if it was
[in the church,

And wrote down our names and were off for the war.

Too soon came the orders to go to the front,

Too soon for those who remained at home,

As well as those who were to bear the battle's brunt.

And little thought we, how long and how awful the struggle
[would be,

Or what a terrible deluge of blood, ere the land should be free.

But we watched them march away from our town on that bright
[spring time day,

One hundred brave boys, how we loved them all.

And Sallie's husband, leading so grand and tall,

And we cheered and shouted, but the tears they would come,

And of the one hundred that went, there were few that came
[home.

" Brave boys were they, gone at their country's call,
And yet, and yet, we can not forget,
That many brave boys must fall."

The Old Piano.

How we watched for letters and news from the front,
As we gathered each evening at the old postoffice,
As for years had been our wont.
How eagerly was each letter read and how oft with bowed
[heads we wept for the dead.
But they oft wrote of stories told round the camp fires bright
And of songs that the darkies would sing,
Mid the sound of merry laughter and the banjos happy ring.

"Far away down South in Alabama,
Where the darkies plant the cotton and the corn
In that land where grows the sweet magnolia
In that land where us darkies all were born."

At last came news of that terrible fray,
When in front of Murfreesboro the hosts stood in battle
[array
'Twas on the first day of the conflict, in the thick of the fight,
Sallie's husband fell in his manhoods proud might.
His last words were these, spoken to a comrade who paused a
[moment by his side,
'Tell Sallie I loved her, that fighting I died
And we'll meet beyond Life's river, where parting is no more.
Comrade I am going, Sallie I ——' his voice failed him,
His life's blood so red, dyed deep mother earth
And Sallie's soldier husband was dead.
Two long days raged the battle with out pause or rest,
Till the tide was stayed by brave boys from the West;
Though in that last charge, many homes were bereft,

The Old Piano.

The question was answered of, who saved the left?
'Two long days the battle raged in front of Murfreesboro
And cannon balls tore up the earth, as plows turn up a furrow'.

There was sorrow in our town, long pungent and deep,
We all mourned with Sallie, her soldier boy who now in
[Southern grave lay asleep.
And to us her little daughter became very dear, now that
And Sallie, our Sallie, a widow forlorn. [papa was gone.
When the gray shadows downward come,
To meet the horizon after setting of sun,
I have often heard her sit at the old piano and sing,
This song of the old home, with its sad lonesome ring.

"I am thinking tonight of the old home and fond recollections they come,
Once again in the old fashioned homestead, I am seated by mother so dear,
As she sang me to sleep every evening, with the old cradle song so dear.
'Hush my dear, lie still and slumber, Holy angels guard thy sleep.

About this time there wandered into our town a colored man,
A sight that was new to our New England village then,
For few of our younger people had ever seen colored men.
But this darkey was jolly, happy and gay
And knew where he was going, for he inquired for the squire's
[right away.
It seems that Sallie's husband had brought him in from a raid,
And after the war was over, he wandered up North to find the
And he was made welcome I can tell you, [Squire he said.
And it was comical to hear him tell of the war from his point
[of view.

The Old Piano.

He used to say, 'White folks I aint got no use for the war,
If dar was any fighting near,
This colored individual proceed to the rear.
Now dar was de General, Missus Sallie's husband,
He'd buckle on his sword and run and get right in front of the
Just as though he thought it was fun [rest,
To be standing right up in front of a gun,
And dat ar gun loaded and bound for to shoot,
Dat's de time dis darkie ud get up and scoot.'

Long years have passed since the war, the smoke of battle
[long fled,
The soldiers, my father was one, had gray headed grown,
The war past to the young, seems like a tale that was told,
When recounted by many a gray veteran old;
To whom be all honor and glory and fame,
For through them is it, we have a name as a country so bold
[and so free,
That our flag is so honored, in all lands and on sea,
So, for the citizen soldier, oft give cheers, three times three.

I wandered to the old village the other day.
The Squire was gone.
In the village church yard his body lay.
He had gone to join Sallie's husband in that home of the blest,
Where in blissful, happy rest, they are waiting for those whom
[on earth they loved the best.
Sallie greeted me in her old quiet way,
The years were telling their tale, her hair was quite gray.

The Old Piano.

Still in her daughter she lived, as in the olden day,
And for me Sallie the younger, must needs sing and play.
Still 'twant like the music her mother made for us long years
[passed away,
Just returned home from boarding school on that bright June
And everything in the house was modern and new, [time day,
In the parlor where the old piano used to stand,
Its place was now occupied by a magnificent grand.
The old one was worn out they say,
So up in the attic, it moulders away.
I looked it up ere I left and it seemed to sing a song,
Written by the sainted Bliss of the pensive piano old,
And with its closing strain we will wish you good night,
Hoping to meet you again,
Wishing for you through life much sunshine and gold,
And if to your pleasure our simple tale has lent,
Our mission is completed, we'll rest content.
So once again wishing you prosperity in all that is right,
The pensive old piano will be our good night.

"There was an old piano covered thickly o'er with dust,
The keys were brown and yellow, and the strings were red with rust,
I thought to play a melody, but touched the keys in vain,
There seemed to come this story, in a wierd and pensive strain."



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